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THE TERROR OF THE POLITICAL:
COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND APOCALYPSE IN DON DELILLO'S

FALLING MAN

by

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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Falling Man by Don DeLillo casts the event of 9/11 and its aftermath in such a way that the novel itself enacts an aesthetic terror aimed at explicating the ubiquitous social-atmospheric elements of community- and identity-formation out of which terror precipitates. As DeLillo figures terrorism in the novel as apocalyptic in that it is a violence that reveals the violence constitutive of political community, including the political community of liberal democracy, which ostensibly relegates violence to domains not considered legitimately political. DeLillo's novel, as an act of aesthetic terrorism, not only thematizes the instantiation of terror that precipitates out of the violence of the political, but also examines the distinct elements in the social-political environment that make the environment vulnerable to precipitations of terrorism. Ultimately the novel presents two gestures toward exodus from the terroristic atmosphere, but these gestures necessarily fail because, focusing too much on the body as an atomic entity, the novel lacks a sufficient acknowledgment of the nature of biopolitical control in the present era.

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Introduction: Terrorism and the Apocalyptic

“These are the days after. Everything now is measured by after” (*Falling Man* 138). As this quote attests, Don DeLillo’s 2007 novel *Falling Man* invites readers to encounter the event of the 9/11 terrorist attacks within an apocalyptic framework. As the towers collapse out of New York City’s iconic skyline, the prior conditions for confronting reality are irrevocably shattered in an apocalyptic moment that consists of a “shift in the basic arrangement of parts and elements” (240). The novel leads us through the apocalyptic scenario by following three characters, Lianne and Keith Neudecker, a separated married couple tenuously reunited after Keith’s survival of the attacks, as well as Hammad, one of the hijackers who participated in the suicide bombing of the towers. By selecting the 9/11 attacks as its narrative backdrop, DeLillo’s novel draws out the dynamic elements of power at work in an event produced by so-called “terrorists.” I will argue that DeLillo casts the event and its aftermath in such a way that the novel itself enacts a narrative terror aimed at reactionary processes of community- and identity-formations. These processes, according to a logic of liberal democracy, would seek to immunize the legitimized violence of American political actors against the admission that the nature of the political is fundamentally already conditioned by antagonistic forces of terror. The terror *of* the novel allows for the spectacle of terror *in* the novel to uncover – through distinct explication of social concepts, such as religion, intimate community, and ritual, that are often taken as enmeshed together – the impossibility of deciding where properly legitimate boundaries can be drawn between religion, politics, and violence.

The scenario that emerges in *Falling Man* can be understood as apocalyptic for a few reasons. For one, the spectacle has cataclysmic effects on the affective condition of the city, whose material state of affairs are so fundamentally and “suddenly” altered.¹ It would seem that this valence of the apocalyptic emerges from DeLillo’s own remarks in “In the Ruins of the Future,” his essay written soon after the event of the attacks. There he casts the event explicitly in terms of the conflict between the terrorists and the United States, saying that “there is no logic in apocalypse. [...] This is heaven and hell, a sense of armed martyrdom as the surpassing drama of human experience” (34). In the apparently unaccountably “new” situation, habitual logics fall away, as previous logics and narratives have been made to submit to a violent drama of eschatological conflict – a war of stories in which one side has momentarily earned a cataclysmic upper hand. However, I argue – perhaps against DeLillo’s own suggestions in the earlier essay – that the scenario in *Falling Man* is apocalyptic in that it is *revelatory*. This follows the biblical etymology of the term, that apocalypse is literally an “uncovering,” in this case not only of agents who had been preparing in secret but also, like pulling away the face of an analog clock to see its gears in action, an uncovering of the power mechanisms that have already been at play and out of which these “new” forces emerge. Marco Abel argues, regarding “In the Ruins of the Future,” that the essay responds to the event of 9/11 “by mobilizing *seeing* as a narrative mode that works from within the image event without

¹ I qualify “sudden” here because, as Nietzsche argues, suddenness is always illusory – what appears sudden to us is always just another stage in the playing out of an ongoing complex of force relations that elude us in the instant (*Gay Science* 112). The event is not atomistic but always constituted by plurality; the event is not marked by a neat division in time but is always a momentary glimpse on a process that has been going on and continues to go on.

imposing itself on it” (195). We could, then, argue that *Falling Man* performs its own sort of apocalyptic terror, as a narrative, not by imposing a *meaning* on the events of 9/11 and their aftermath but by violently directing our attention to the violence enacted by our own processes of making meaning and establishing common recognition through the event.

While terrorism, like apocalypse, appears as a spectacular breach in the normal or normative order of things, terrorism reveals the latent forces that have been present all along, the violence always already inherent in the political. In this way, terrorism should be understood as an apocalyptic form of violence, with revelatory power. John R. Hall, in his analysis with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvain Trinh of the violence that occurred late in the 20th century involving particular millenarian or apocalyptic sects, draws on Walter Benjamin’s interpretive frame of the historical present as shot through with “Messianic time.” He says, “In this light, though potent episodes of apocalyptic violence seemingly transpire outside the linear flow of History, they cannot be separated from the established social orders in which they arise. [...] Apocalyptic violence marks the faultlines of an Apocalypse wider in scope. Observing the one will help disclose the other” (Hall 14). The violence that erupts in what are called acts of terror reveals the violence that is at play in the constitution of the social order into which, or more precisely, *out of* which terror precipitates.

The explicatory nature of apocalyptic violence, as described by Hall et al., takes on a similar activity to that which others have argued is within the essential nature of modern terrorism. Peter Sloterdijk, for instance, argues that terror demands an acceleration in explication, or a profound increase in the articulation of atmospheric conditions – the very conditions for living – and the poisoning of these conditions

(Sloterdijk 7). He draws his analysis from the innovation of gas warfare introduced by the Germans at Ypres Salient in 1915, an event marking a shift in the essential methodology of modern warfare to what he calls “atmoterrorism,” targeting “no longer the body, but the enemy’s environment” (14). This new technology and science of modern warfare sought to explain the fundamental elements that comprise the air, or the conditions for life, in which the enemy exists and moves, and to poison those conditions, causing enemy combatants to literally breathe themselves to death. Under such conditions of terrorism, those caught in the play of modern warfare will continue to perform the habitual and necessary processes of maintaining their status of living within a poisoned domain, such that to continue to pursue life is to actively seize and ingest one’s death. It is possible, however, when interpreting such methodologies of modern terror within the framework of modern terror as *apocalyptic* violence, that the conditions of life as we know it are revealed to have always been poisonous and that the hegemonic faction presiding over the constitution of the political community that crystallizes out of the violence of the political, explicating their own conditions for survival against opposition, has cast its own immunizing gas over the atmosphere, eliminating what is pathogenic only to itself. What are called acts of terror by the hegemonic sect involve the invasion of the pathogen into the immunized system, but the invasion of the pathogen is at the same time the return of a violence that had been controlled by a more dominating violence. The apparent breach in the norm reveals what has been present, active in the atmosphere, all along. *Falling Man* delivers just such an apocalyptic terrorism in explicating these ubiquitous mechanisms of immunity that condition the political. However, in the last section of this essay, I will argue that, while the novel provides a couple gestures toward exodus from this

generalized terror, these gestures fail because the novel lacks a sufficient acknowledgement of the nature of power in contemporary control society.

“There are no others.”: The Terror of Community

Falling Man is unique among post-9/11 novels for paying specific attention to the suicide bombers themselves. In the sections that conclude the novel’s three parts, *Falling Man* describes the sort of individual and communal subjectivities that administer acts of ideological terror. DeLillo reveals, in his explication of these presumably pathogenic social conditions that allow for the emergence of terrorism, the relations these social conditions hold to domains that liberal democratic conceptions would place beyond the definite limits of what is called terrorism. In a sense, then, the novel’s own act of terror consists of its presentation of social relations within and outside the presumptive “closed” space of the terrorist cell as structurally similar, thus making the more presumptively harmless assemblages of social conditions appear as amenable to terror. The latent conditions that produce terror inhabit all spheres of society, indifferent, in their dynamic nature *per se*, to the nationalistic or religious identifiers we apply to them.

The novel, in this regard, characterizes what has been called “radicalization” as a function of community, of the personal relationships and singular affects at play in a particular community’s self-constitution. If we accept that the novel characterizes this process *as* a process bound up in community, then John Carlos Rowe is not quite right (though also not quite wrong) to say that DeLillo presents the terrorists here as the dogmatic totalitarian opposite of Western ambiguity (128-9). By casting Hammad’s

assimilation as happening through processes that, as I will show later, proliferate as well in DeLillo's explication in the novel of American community-formation, DeLillo draws a symmetry between these terrorists and American power. The section titled "On Marienstrasse" narrates the gradual integration of Hammad into the Islamist cell, led by Amir (better known as Mohamed Atta), biding time in a German flat. Hammad's integration involves an encounter with others who sought to share what they held in common with him as well, and the encounter is figured as contingent on their bodily nearness within the space of the flat, as counter-posed to the distance inherent to the state's technologies of surveillance. "But we encounter face to face," the narration goes. "A man turns up from Kandahar, another from Riyadh. We encounter directly, in the flat or in the mosque. The state has fiber optics but power is helpless against us. The more power, the more helpless. We encounter through eyes, through word and look" (81). In these lines, the affective associations in the local encounter between bodies and utterances, which are an important segment of the forces that allow this particular community to coalesce, prove more powerful than the state's version of encounter, mediated through technologies of surveillance and security. This community crystallizes through the relationality of localized conversation, through praying together, and through the establishing of communal norms. An example of one such communal norm, linked to a specific liturgical morality, is the mandate for the men to grow beards. "They were all growing beards. One of them even told his father to grow a beard. Men came to the flat on Marienstrasse, some to visit, others to live, men in and out all the time, growing beards" (79). This growing of beards functions as a visible indication of the community members' adherence to the group, a sign that while enforced locally as a common

practice also roots the group's common practices in a dogmatic interpretation of Muslim ritualistic prescription.

Amir, as an agent involved in the community's ongoing self-constitution, uses this liturgical morality to point out to Hammad the ways in which he has not yet come into accord with the active identity of the group, which is contingent on a particular constellation of moral prescriptions. "Eating all the time, pushing food in your face, slow to approach your prayers. There was more. Being with a shameless woman, dragging your body over hers. What is the difference between you and all the others, outside our space?" (83). In order for Hammad to more fully identify with the group, to come into communion with them, he must have articulated to him the specific points at which he does not belong to the group, defined here as practices. Moreover, the difference delineated here by moral practice is not only about the inside and the outside of the community but also and more strongly one between friend and enemy. This call to repentance for Hammad is set against the visible signs of immorality (particularly *sexual* immorality) that Hammad earlier recognizes as indicating the enemies of the community, as he remarks on the setting of "local strolling whores" outside the flat: "Now he knew this as well, the face of combat in the long war" (78). In this way, the moral prescriptions of the group, involving a particular conception of what is the *good* of human action, do not merely designate one's identity as belonging to the group but also draw the battle lines in what is interpreted to be a necessarily violent conflict between the community and its enemies.

Hammad's integration into the community as a friend, additionally, functions as an education in the interpretations of Islam that figure the entire struggle of Islam as a

historical war against Western forces, “determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds” (79). Hammad listens to an older man, a former rifleman in the Shatt al Arab under Saddam Hussein, reflect on the war cries of the young Iranian martyrs that he was ordered to kill: “The boys were sounding the cry of history, the story of ancient Shia defeat and the allegiance of the living to those who were dead and defeated. That cry is still close to me, he said. Not like something happening yesterday but something always happening, over a thousand years happening, always in the air” (78). The Iraqi veteran’s comments here imply that this bloody conflict is a background condition of the present, that it has constituted the air within which political struggle takes place long before the particular battle at the Shatt al Arab, as though the violence of war and the necessity of martyrdom were simply precipitations of a larger global social-atmospheric violence. The goals of the community in the flat on Marienstrasse are articulated within this interpretive frame. For them, the violence that has always been in the background occurs between an Islam that, being an all-encompassing worldview and way of life, demands global expansion and the other factional forces that either seek to protect a hegemony that they already hold or demand their own total expansion. “There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies” (80). The community experiences their isolation as a violation because the precepts of their common identity fundamentally oppose their privatization, their exclusion from the public arena. Hammad thinks to himself, “Even if the room is a place of prayer, he can’t stay there all his life. Islam is the world outside the prayer room as well as the *sūrah*s in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and

far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans” (80). Implicit in these sentiments is the description of their Islamism as a religious globalism of identity. But, paradoxically perhaps, due to the seeming unboundedness of its claims to global territory, this Islamism is also the identity of a bounded community that negates the validity of other communities – it is a tragically finite communal identity that claims a territorial infinity. Elsewhere Hammad, more fully incorporated into the community at this point, picks up this theme in his reflections on the ultimate teleology of the group’s identity: “It was all Islam, the rivers and streams. Pick up a stone and hold it in your fist, this is Islam. God’s name on every tongue throughout the countryside. There was no feeling like this ever in his life. He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God” (172). The global claims of the identity common to this group enforce and are enforced by the community’s common teleology. In accordance with the apocalyptic vision of the community, individuated distinctions between people are collapsed within what would be the fulfillment of this totalizing identity: “The time is coming, our truth, our shame, and each man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation” (80). At the core of this terrorism, then, is a unified identity of a globalized community – a political community whose self-constitution lays claim to identification of others who would constitute themselves otherwise.

We see in Hammad’s transition from a marginally interested figure to his full incorporation in the cadre a glimpse of the mechanics by which intimate affective relations of communion may turn over into the enforcement of totalizing identities. The process of self-constitution for Hammad that functions first through his conversations

with the other men is catalyzed by his desire to belong to them. His move toward belonging involves two further movements: on the one hand, his appropriation of the common vision the group holds regarding the nature and future of the world and, on the other hand, the incorporation of the moral directives – the constitutional “I will not’s,” as Nietzsche might put it² – of the community. As Hammad washes his identity into the more definitive identity of the group, grasping their dreams, imbibing their laws, we might call this process his “radicalization.” Yet this process is depicted in the novel as occurring through the altogether common affective process of achieving a sense of belonging in the world, of assimilating into a community. What makes this a radicalization, then, is the fact that this is a community organized around a core political identity, and a core delimitation of the *good* of global society. We see in this cell of Islamists a singular instance of the larger structures of terror that have governed and are governing, yet here manifesting themselves in a group that has not already gained hegemony.

Here I refer to the definition of terror put forward by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where terror describes, more broadly than spectacular

² Following a discussion of the sadistic forms of torture and sovereign penal practices that Germany used to enforce an anchoring German *memory* into the people, Nietzsche writes, “With the aid of such images and procedures one finally remembers five or six ‘I will not’s,’ in regard to which one had given one’s *promise* so as to participate in the advantages of society—and it was indeed with the aid of this kind of memory that one at last came ‘to reason’!” (*Basic Writings* 498). Here Nietzsche shows the manner in which unique moral imperatives can function as forces of violence in driving individuals into a particular constellation of community. While Nietzsche seems to suggest that the violence of morality necessarily comes backed by the strong-arm of direct or symbolic sovereign violence, it is possible that in the contemporary situation the seduction of community and the fear of being without it offers violence enough to function in the dynamic feedback loop of moral imperatives and forces of communal belonging.

instances of violence, the ideological motor of totalitarian power. Against the notion that totalitarian governments are essentially lawless, Arendt argues that they do enforce a law, but one which should not be understood as *limiting* in nature. Rather, totalitarian law is essentially *motivating*, aimed at affirming or producing a certain reality. Terror, in totalitarianism, describes the process of enforcing a fundamentally totalizing law. “Terror is lawfulness,” she writes, “if law is the law of the movement of some suprahuman force, Nature or History” (465). She describes terror as the realization of the law of movement and uses the examples that are key to Nazi totalitarianism (i.e. Nature) and to Stalinist totalitarianism (i.e. History). For both iterations of totalitarian government, something beyond immanent human action is taken to be guiding the forces of social development, defining their progression toward a futurity that, whether utopian or not, clearly sketches the direction in which progress flows. Moreover, in totalitarian governance there is an “identification of man and law” (462). We could extrapolate, then, from Arendt’s analysis of state terror that “terror” describes any and all of the mechanisms it takes to import this political-legal identity, this particular constitution of political community, into the individual’s mechanisms of self-constitution, such that the one becomes a microcosm of the *people*, a homunculus identically representative of the larger homogenous leviathan. However, as we have seen already on display in *Falling Man*, these mechanisms of totalitarian terror need not exist on the larger scale of national governments, and they also need not enlist either the forces of secret police or militant coercion in order to put subjects into accordance with the law. *Falling Man* instead shows that much less apparently drastic forces of typical community-formation – through intimate affective relationships between people seeking mutual belonging with each other

as well as belonging in the world – can also amount to terror. Following Arendt, terror requires simply the dual-elements of, on the one hand, a teleology of the world and, on the other hand, an active ideological identity that can enforce individual movement toward the *telos* of the world. The terrorism of the figures in *Falling Man* are then no less totalitarian for their lack of global hegemony or their lack of a legitimized state form.

However, what is at stake in this explication of the terrorism of Hammad's cadre is not a presentation of that particular political community as *exceptionally* identifiable with the totalitarian power structures Arendt describes. Despite the implications of Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism – that these sorts of systems are to be contrasted with liberal democratic political systems that are presumed to possess an accessible public sphere for deliberating on the construction of a shared world and are themselves decidedly not terroristic – the explication of the particular force inherent in the strategies of the Islamist cell in *Falling Man* serves to reveal the structurally similar strategies of forces that are present in liberal democracy as well. In his essay "The Spirit of Terrorism," Jean Baudrillard remarks on the way Americans have viewed Islam as a viral force, infiltrating various social realms across the globe, but Baudrillard reframes this inimical figuration of Islam as instead "the moving front along which the antagonism crystallized," an antagonism between terroristic imaginaries that reside in each of us (15). While the methods and results of events of terroristic encounter, such as involved in 9/11, differ between each other both in form and in scope, the encounter is a conflict of terrorisms – that is, ways of enforcing a particular constitution of political community. The encounter with terrorism is an encounter with "an excess of reality" in opposition to the community's own delimitation of reality (18). In other words, *terrorism* denotes both

the violence that functions in the imposition of an identity of life onto a political community that vies for hegemony and the image of that which is beyond the limits of that identity, that which would signal the death of the community so identified. Events of terror carry the symbolic weight of the shattering of that limit, the death of a particular articulation of life.

This violent encounter occurs not only in the realm of the imaginary and the symbolic but also between forces of political violence that are immanently active in the material production of political structures. The terror of the event is the crystallization of antagonisms, as Baudrillard argues, and these antagonisms animate legislation, civic organization, law enforcement, and other elements. This is at least no less the case in liberal democracy than in other political systems. Talal Asad argues against liberal democracy's ostensible sanctions against violence, its ostensible separation of violence from legitimate political practices, and instead proposes that violence is integral to liberalism. However, liberalism has built into itself mechanisms of obscuring violence such that the forms violence takes involve a paradoxical "combination of cruelty and compassion that sophisticated social institutions enable and encourage" (3). Asad critiques "just war" doctrines and the "clash of civilizations" hypothesis to point out the ways liberalism attempts to hide its own spaces of violence by shifting the boundary lines between legitimate and criminal violence. In liberalism, legitimate violence is transferred to the domain of *war*, eliminating it from what is understood to be the domain of the *political*. Furthermore, as Asad claims commenting on Michael Walzer's work, terrorism is criminalized, but exceptionally so, such that terrorism marks a crime worse than murder for the state of fear it uniquely provokes. "For Walzer, of course, it is not merely

the deliberate creation of fear for political purposes that defines terrorism; the killing of innocents is a necessary (though not sufficient) criterion” (16). By criminalizing terror in this way and by transferring *legitimate* violence against foreign adversaries (as well as members of the state’s own military) to the domain of war, liberal states allow themselves to respond to terroristic acts of violence with a congruent violence while absolving themselves of the legal attribution of guilt.

While Walzer argues that what allows a state to commit such cruel violence is the state’s nature as an instrument of security for the political community it circumscribes, Asad argues that the modern state must not be understood as a mere *instrument* of political community. Rather, “[i]t is an autonomous structure that regulates, represents, and protects a community of citizens. The state authorizes the killing of human beings, demands the ultimate sacrifice of its citizens when they are at war. It seeks to maintain the correct demographic character and the desired territorial extent for the community that is its object” (19). The political community is the *object* of the state. The violence of liberalism emerges from liberalism’s own nature: the legal limits it sets and enforces, the violence necessary in the conditions of possibility for its originary foundation. In liberalism’s constitution of rights and liberties for citizens, as well as its criminalization of that which exceeds those limits, liberalism is horrified by terrorism because terrorism appears as a direct affront to the legitimacy of those limits. Terrorism appears to the liberal imaginary as “the limitless pursuit of freedom, the illusion of an uncoerced interiority that can withstand the force of institutional disciplines” (91). But liberalism has always already enacted violence as a means of maintaining its own political community. The illusions of tolerance and the regulation of freedom through civil rights

and liberties constitute the way the liberal state imagines itself, who it is and who it inscribes, so the forms of coercive violence used to preserve that community – through, for instance, the foundation and enforcement of laws – always appear as just, legitimate, and necessary to the liberal community.

This account of liberalism allows us to (re)conceive the nature of *the political* as such, because it seems that there is no way out of violent antagonism as far as the construction of social worlds is concerned. The apocalyptic nature of terrorism draws these conditions into visibility. Walter Benjamin – certainly writing during an apocalyptic moment of state terrorism – argues in his “Critique of Violence” that the violence of the political involves at least two elements – lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence – both of which are characteristic of militarism, in that militarism “is the compulsory, universal use of violence as a means to the ends of the state” (284). In his critique, Benjamin problematizes any distinctions between legal violence and war, and even between violence itself and the law, because as he says, in so far as violence is used for natural ends, “there is inherent in all such violence a lawmaking character” (284). As Roberto Esposito claims, Benjamin defines violence as existing neither merely before the law nor after the law but as constantly accompanying and constituting the law. Violent acts found the law, exclude all forms of violence that exist outside that particular legal violence, and go on to enforce that exclusion of illegal violence. He says, “In the final analysis, this is what the law is: violence against violence in order to control violence” (*Immunitas* 29). Legality – even *liberal* legality – is identical with a version of violence, and yet liberal democracy addresses violence as that which exists beyond the law, that which the law must control through the means of control it has at its disposal, which is,

namely, violence. Terrorism, then, can be understood as that form of violence that is excluded from a particular delimitation of the law and yet simultaneously challenges the control that legal violence would maintain over its domain.

This notion of terrorism as the free radical element that undermines the system while constituting itself outside of it reveals the paradox in the Arendtian totalitarian form of terror discussed above. From one vantage point, terror invades the system, exploiting a lack of control and provoking a loss of control. From another vantage point, however, terror is the control itself. It is the act of establishing and enforcing an identity for the political system through violence, which may look like what we automatically perceive as the institution and preservation of laws, but it may take on other forms as well, which, as Benjamin points out, have no less of a lawmaking character. This paradox resolves itself if we view the domain of the political as conditioned upon a violent antagonism between competing communities. Chantal Mouffe defines a distinction between *the political* and *politics*, where *the political* is “the dimension of hostility and antagonism that is an ever-present possibility in all human society, antagonism that can take many different forms and emerge in diverse social relations” (“Religion” 323). This definition of the political understands the condition of interaction between persons and groups as a virtual physics of force relations in which encounter, contestation, and violence are inherent to the conditions necessary for particular politics to emerge. Mouffe then defines *politics* as “the ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence under conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of the political” (323). Politics constitutes an activity conditioned by the nature of the political out of

which the activity occurs. In this framework, politics is necessarily violent because it seeks to impose order and unity – a particular *regime* – onto social existence, thus redirecting, eliminating, or suppressing forces that strive toward other potential orders excluded by the regime. Therefore, politics takes hold of the means of constituting the political community, of defining what is the common sense or the common good of that political community, which requires a violent antagonism on a fundamental level between differing conceptions of the political community and the political identities of citizenship belonging to that community.

Here I am picking up a further critique of the presumptions of liberal democracy that is elaborated by Mouffe in her argument that the idea of “consensus” that grounds the possibility of deliberative versions of liberal democracy, as well as the idea of “rationality” that makes possible Rawlsian forms of liberal democracy, “is – and will always be – the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations” (*Democratic Paradox* 49). This is because both deliberative “consensus” and Rawlsian “rationality” have obscured the preconditions that determine who has access to the public sphere wherein political decision-making is purported to occur: all constitutions of a public involve a drawing of the boundary between who belongs to that public and can affect its decisions and who does not belong, who is the “us” and who is the “them.” Mouffe then proposes a more radical conception of democracy that rejects the notion of a non-coercive consensus along with the notion of a non-exclusive sphere of rational argument (33). With the objectified illusions of citizenship – forms of representation that are rooted in a particular construction of the *people* to whom a political society belongs – one faction (or legitimized range of factions, such as in party politics) gains hegemony

over others and then, through legal violence, excludes those others from access to the public mechanisms of decision, that is, unless they are capable of conforming themselves to the sort of political identity around which the system has been constructed.

Therefore, contrary to the claims of liberalism, terrorism is inherent to liberalism's own mechanisms of establishing and maintaining power because these mechanisms involve crucial elements that are at work in the sort of enclosed community-formation that we have already seen at work in the constitution of Hammad's community of Islamists. In noting such a symmetry here, I question the typical discursive and legal manner in which liberalism excludes religion from the work of politics. Most forms of modern liberalism rely on some version of political secularism – holding that while citizens should be free to practice their various forms of religious devotion in private, they are prohibited from attempting to incorporate those religious beliefs or practices into the public body of the political structures. American constitutional democracy does this explicitly by simultaneously prohibiting the establishment of a state religion while also protecting the free exercise of religion. This double-strategy of religious liberty legislation receives its coherence only by relying on a strict division between the public and private spheres of activity. Mouffe argues, "It is, I submit, the tendency to identify politics with the state and the state with the public that has led to the mistaken idea that the separation between church and state means the absolute relegation of religion to the private" ("Religion" 325). However, such a play of distinction, in its implicit association of the state and the public, obscures that secularity itself is a communal value that has no necessary rational privilege for its hegemony in law other than a triumph of the forces of power that construct the political. Once we accept that liberalism is already founded and

enforced by violence, the sin of terrorism from the vantage point of liberalism is not only its use of violence against violence but also its spectacular display of forcing private values onto the public stage in a way that cannot be controlled by legal violence.³

This leads me then to define terrorism more centrally neither simply in terms of physical violence or affective results, nor in terms of the blurring of private and public distinctions (because that is only relevant to terror that acts against liberalism), but in terms of how a community forms and immunizes itself against its outside. Esposito casts this predicament in a couple of parallel ways in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* and *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, respectively. In *Communitas*, Esposito argues for a re-understanding of the way we define the nature of community by, in part, turning to its etymology, which involves the adjunction of the Latin words *cum*, meaning “with” or “between,” and *munus*, which is not a property but rather works as a type of *donum*, or gift. The *munus* can be understood as a task, a debt, an office to be carried out, or an obligation – more specifically, “the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation. The gratitude that *demands* new donations” (5). Esposito’s framework here understands community as the sharing in common of an incompleteness that each owes to the other; in the meeting of the plural, the singular individual experiences the interruption of the closure of her identity and so is

³ This is not to say that we do not already see instances of religiously-motivated legislation within liberal democracy. For instance, in America the original Defense of Marriage Act as well as the various discussions surrounding abortion legislation and, at the state level, religious liberty protections of private store owners to turn down clients for religious reasons have been pushed by religious communities and are difficult to justify on non-religious grounds or grounds that are not based in specific moral systems. Instances such as these simply underscore that the hegemony of communities is always shifting and renegotiating according to the movements of power.

fundamentally *not* individual. However, an individual or a community acts against this necessary interruption of closure when it does seek to define itself around some specified common property, origin, and/or destiny. With the negation of this closure, the refusal of the gift we owe each other and the lack that we constantly obtain, the *cum-munus* becomes an *im-munus* – hence, it is immunized. Esposito goes on in *Bíos* to expound upon the biomedical metaphor at play in his theorization of political community, how the idea draws together the two poles of biopolitics: biology and politics:

[T]he category of “immunity,” even in its current meaning, is inscribed precisely in their intersection, that is, on the tangential line that links the sphere of life with that of law. Where “immunity” for the biomedical sphere refers to a condition of natural or induced refractoriness on the part of a living organism when faced with a given disease, immunity in political-juridical language alludes to a temporary or definitive exemption on the part of subject with regard to concrete obligations or responsibilities that under normal circumstances would bind one to others. [...] Rather than being superimposed or juxtaposed in an external form that subjects one to the domination of the other, in the immunitary paradigm, *bíos* and *nomos*, life and politics, emerge as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole that assumes meaning from their interrelation. Not simply the relation that joins life to power, immunity is the power to preserve life. (45-6)

In this characterization of immunity, the community, placing itself in a state of exception, ingests the disease as a means of paradoxically preserving itself. The disease here, more

paradoxically, is life itself, a politics *over* life in which the political community establishes a form of life that then allows them to militarize the protection of that form of life.

The outside of the community (whether or not that outside actually exists through figures *internal* to the territory occupied by the community) that transgresses the community's identity violates the life of the community and therefore must be defended against, which was the point of immunizing the community in the first place. The immunity is by nature limiting, finite. "Every time that the excess of meaning of a community—occupied by its own collective essence—wanted to counter the vacuum of sense produced in the individualistic paradigm, the consequences were destructive: first with regard to external or internal enemies against which such a community is constructed, and second with regard to itself" (*Communitas* 143). The process of a community's auto-immunization is then destructive in its own acts of constituting itself against an outside, in part, because it will always need to excise the excess of its reality within its territory. This can provoke a habitual mode of identification that forces the political community to constantly increase its policing of itself to root out those elements whose identities run antagonistic to the established common properties, the "official" form(s) of life. Such a process falls within the logic of Arendtian terror and can lead ultimately to just the sort of totalitarian state edifice she describes.

Still, there is always an excess of reality to an identity of life, however constituted. Even the life of a singular individual is never comprehensive, insofar as the individual is always an incomplete process produced in the flux of *communitas*'s constant interruption of closure – its infinite openness. The theory of individuation we find in

Esposito describes an unending activity of being-with others. The autoimmune community attempts to draft a rigid continuity between individuals by establishing a common form around certain properties, and yet in doing so, it annihilates the ontological giving or obligation that individuals already shared in the first place. Immunity enacts a terror on the fundamental condition of being-together that constitutes the multitude. If, then, another autoimmune community aggresses against the first one's form of life through an identifiable encounter, which must manifest in violence, the first community identifies the encounter as an act of terrorism. We see now, though, that the act of terror had already happened – it was the people's condition of being – and that this violent encounter must be understood as a terror against terror: two political constitutions seeking a certain life and hegemony, yet in such a way that can only manifest in the death of self and other. The asymmetry of power in the situation, as well as the singularity of contingencies in the event of the encounter, allows for histories that write the situation as an exceptional event, an aggressive act of war, the original moment of a new Age of Terror.

The act of identification constitutes the core of a terroristic encounter: the political community identifies itself and, alternatively, identifies the other, the aggressor. There is an irony in this identification, however, in that by identifying the other, one fails to see them; one sees only the inimical identity. DeLillo draws this catastrophic failure of identity to the fore in *Falling Man* in several ways. For one, the rationality of the suicide bombers' act can be understood as the erasure of the victims through an act of mass identification. This is the meaning of Amir's response to Hammad's question, "What about the others, those who will die?": "Amir said simply there are no others. The others

exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying” (176). There is a brutal honesty in Amir’s remarks. He acknowledges the contradictory identity that their politics ascribes to their victims. On the one hand, these people do not exist, since their lives unfold outside the limits of the terroristic imaginary framework. On the other hand, their lives are reduced to a specific minimal role: the mere fact of dying in the encounter. The view articulated by DeLillo here captures the basic fact of the encounter between the community of terror and its enemy: the enemy has no claims to life, but a “life” – a determinate form of life – is given them by the community of terror. This life is a death because it is defined through negation of the community’s own immunized life. What is life to the self is death to the other, unless the other can be figured as identical to the self – as in the autoimmunity of the community, or by a process of conversion. Abel provides a similar interpretation of the invisibility of the other produced through terrorism: “The other bypasses us. The terrorist’s self is non-self-identical to itself: the I of the self is always already an other” (200). Here, too, the community of terror cannot see the other, but as it plots the other’s narrative position in the community’s scripted unfolding of life, the invisibility of the other is written as a negation of life, as a scripted death.

What DeLillo’s novel does not allow us, however, is the luxury of confining this mode of terror to strictly religious communities and identities. The annihilation of identity, in its immunization, shows up as well in the case of the character Martin Ridnour, an art dealer and the lover of Lianne’s mother Nina Bartos. It becomes clear in Lianne and Nina’s conversations that Martin had lived a past life as a violent political

idealist back in Europe. Nina says, “I know one thing. He was a member of a collective in the late nineteen sixties. Kommune One. Demonstrating against the German state, the fascist state. That’s how they saw it. First they threw eggs. Then they set off bombs. After that I’m not sure what he did. I think he was in Italy for a while, in the turmoil, when the Red Brigades were active” (146). Nina goes on to say that Martin once owned a wanted poster depicting “German terrorists of the early seventies. Nineteen names and faces” (147). This image alone draws a congruity between those German political terrorists and the Islamist terrorists of the 9/11 attacks, who were also depicted in an infamous poster of nineteen names and faces. To further emphasize the similarities between Martin’s acts in the past and the suicide bombers, Nina explains Martin’s own sense of complicated kinship: “He thinks these people, these jihadists, he thinks they have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies. He thinks they’re all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood” (147). It is key that what unites the communities of Kommune One and the Islamist suicide bombers is the ideal of “world brotherhood,” which we can take here to mean the expansion of a particular political community – holding to a common bounded identity – over the entire globe. While their acts of violence and encounter may contingently confine themselves to a specific locale at a given moment, in their nature all terroristic identities are global in tendency, due in part to their act of articulating *the human and life* as such. Their teleologies involve a definition of life and a good for the life of the community that allows for no fundamental pluralism or dissent. This terrorism is an imperialism of identity, a resistance to an identified extant hegemony in some form – whether the identified conservatism of Berlin in the sixties and seventies or the

identified Western technocracy and militarism at the turn of the 21st century. In both cases, a dominant terrorism is countered by an oppositional terrorism of a different form in pursuit of the means of reconstituting the domain of politics in which the *citizen* and the *good* of society are inscribed. Such resistance keeps political actors bound to the mechanisms, under a different hue, that create the reigns of terror they abhor.

Hammad, through his integration into and identification with Amir's circle, loses himself as he becomes part of the community. He dresses himself in the narrative of the group, the form of life written into it, determined, with them, "to become one mind. Shed everything but the men you are with. [...] He was becoming one of them now, learning to look like them and think like them. This was inseparable from jihad. He prayed with them to be with them. They were becoming total brothers" (83). The process of individuation as described by Esposito, by which an individual is constantly undone through the obligatory sharing among others in the relation of *communitas*, is turned inside out. The closure of identity that blocks the interruption of an individual's always unfinished becoming rejects the individual, as though a graft that was sutured to patch an open wound had rejected the host. The sutured identity, by closing in Hammad against the community's outside, takes him over, washes him in the identity of the group, and he becomes finally the *proprium* that they share – "[E]ach man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation" (80). Hammad becomes lost in the life of the community; he becomes dead to himself. "He was not here, it was not him" (175). Here again the symmetry between the terrorism of Hammad and of Martin Ridnour emerges in the loss of self, the self's reconstitution as other. Nina confesses to Lianne the secret that she knows: Martin's name is Ernst Hechinger (148). The question of names

recurs throughout the novel, the question of false names and real identities, names ascribed to others, how one is named, and how one (re)names oneself. Joseph M. Conte describes this name-swapping in the novel as a “metanomasia” that consists of the transferal of names between recognized mass murderers and familiar figures in order to destabilize our presumptuousness regarding such constitutive distinctions (570). I will return to this theme of destabilizing our acts of recognition in my discussion of the aesthetic terrorism that the novel performs. While we might want to consider “Ernst Hechinger” as Martin’s *real* or *true* name – and “Martin Ridnour” as a reformed fiction – I would argue that Hechinger became Martin’s false name when, in the community of terror, he learned to identify himself with the violent political goals of the group. Like Hammad, he would have washed himself in the life of the community such that he became dead to himself. He is the art dealer, the lover of Nina, formerly known as the terrorist Ernst Hechinger, but Ernst Hechinger is dead now. In the scheme of political terror, individual identity always tends toward a suicide at the hands of the community that encloses the self.

Nina’s revelation to Lianne provokes a crucial recognition for Lianne that directs our attention to the terror that this novel performs: “She wanted to punish her mother but not for Martin or not just for that. It was nearer and deeper and finally about one thing only. This is what everything was about, *who they were*, the fierce clasp, like hands bound in prayer, now and evermore” (148, emphasis added). The revelation that Martin was once another man known as Ernst Hechinger is an apocalyptic intervention for Lianne: it reveals something greater about the background condition of her own identity, of her common identity with her mother, of the interrelation of all identities in a shared

space. The small revelation of the changed name provokes them to ask a larger question about *who they were*. This is a question that the novel continues to trouble as it enacts its own apocalyptic terror, exploding the conditions for identity-formation while simultaneously working to make visible the very mechanisms that drive the formation of identity and political community.

“The awful openness of it”: An Aesthetics of Terror

The terroristic encounter is constantly present in the text, not merely in its ongoing string of effects in the lives of the characters but also in DeLillo’s insistence that we continue to confront the terror *as* an act that constantly reemerges. As noted by John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec in their introduction to a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* on the topic of the literature of 9/11, much of the scholarly conversation so far regarding *Falling Man*, as well as other literature about 9/11, has thematized the event of 9/11 as a traumatic encounter (395-6). The goal in such analyses is often to discover in what ways the collective identity of post-9/11 America is shaped by this trauma, and the conclusion seems to be that the novel either fails to give an adequate account of the traumatic event or provokes trauma in such a way that removes the possibility for gaining a new understanding of what it means to belong to a collective American identity following the attacks. As an example of the first conclusion, Richard Gray argues that rather than robustly articulating the particular melancholia that followed the 9/11 attacks, *Falling Man* is “immured in the melancholic state, offering a vernal equivalent of immobility, that it is symptom rather than diagnosis” (28). Gray argues that, rather than

truly confronting the traumatic event, *Falling Man* resorts to the depiction of characters who, in their recourse to familiar structures, seek to domesticate the trauma, thereby assimilating it into habitual modes of being. Duvall himself, on the other hand, argues that the novel, rather than reveling in trauma, provokes it as a means to point out art's limitations to mediate trauma. The adequate aesthetic mediation of trauma will reveal both the impossibility of predicting the ways individuals will respond to trauma's mediation and the incommensurability of individual and collective responses to trauma. Duvall asserts that *Falling Man*'s performance of trauma offers us "a partial glimpse into trauma's unknowing" ("Witnessing Trauma" 168). While Duvall rightly raises the point that the deconstructive function of the encounter with terrorism in the novel should be looked at as a valuable function of the work, both critics presume that the significance of the novel rests in what it *does not* or *cannot* reveal.

For these critics, the novel at best points out the lie in the consolations we find following a traumatic event. It is worth considering, however, Nietzsche's aphorism, "Even when the mouth lies, the way it looks still tells the truth" (*Basic Writings* 282). I will argue that, in pointing out the forms such consolations take, the novel reveals the functional mechanisms that make up the field within which both terror and response to terror precipitate. What DeLillo accomplishes in *Falling Man* is a shift from viewing terrorism as an isolated encounter toward a view that describes terrorism as a structural component of power that constitutes the encounter as such between an immunized *us* and *them* – between an enclosed *I* and an identified *you*. This interpretation does not valorize the role of empathy as, for instance, Mary Manjikian does in arguing that the novel works to put "a human face on the tragedy" by "seeking to make rational that which previously

was simply condemned” (301). Rather, the novel serves to problematize the means by which we establish empathy in the act of identifying (with) another, even while forcing us to confront the interiority of the terrorists. Additionally, through his use of the Falling Man performance artist, identified after his death as the actor David Janiak, DeLillo introduces into the text an aesthetic form of the terroristic encounter that captures the aesthetic element of violence in suicide terrorism and the horror it provokes in a helpless audience unable to evade the encounter. As an aesthetic terrorism that is also apocalyptic, this violence both proliferates through the effects of the encounter while simultaneously revealing the already extant and diffusive mechanics of violence that it functions within and against.

While the Falling Man performance artist maintains little impact on the drama unfolding between Lianne and Keith in the wake of 9/11, the Falling Man as a motif alerts us to the central explicative work being done *by* the novel with regard to the terroristic functioning of identity, as well as terrorism’s effect on the identities of the spectators. Lianne encounters the Falling Man twice through the course of the novel, the first time at 42nd Street, looking out from Grand Central Station: “A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides. A safety harness was barely visible, emerging from his trousers at the straightened leg and fastened to the decorative rail of the viaduct” (33). Lianne has heard of this performance artist, who suspends himself at various locations throughout the city in the pose of the falling man from the famous Associated Press photograph taken by Richard Drew. The Falling Man forces upon his spectators a horrific image associated with the attacks on the World Trade Center in such a way that they cannot evade responding yet

again to that event they wish to place in the past, a time that precedes everything that is now marked by *after*: “He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump” (33). The Falling Man *presents* the event of terror, and in doing so, he exerts an aesthetic form of violence that produces affects in onlookers that they had associated with the spectacle of that Tuesday morning in September. The bystanders despise the artist, while Lianne considers the aesthetic nature of his act: “There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body’s last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we’d not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all” (33). The Falling Man manipulates the response of the spectators as in a “puppetry of human desperation” – or we might say he conducts them, orchestrates their response, a framing made even more poignant by his having attempted another “performance” inside a concert hall before being escorted out by the police. He accomplishes this effect not by administering some order on the elements at play in the space, as when a conductor guides the various instruments to a harmonious sound, but by demolishing the conditions of order, however fragile they had already become. The “awful openness” of the Falling Man is within the nature of terrorism as we know it: the eruption of closure, the fracturing of the illusions of sense administered by our reality-creating perceptual mechanisms. The body falls through the air in a manner that the people could not have experienced but by being present to the spectacle on that Tuesday morning, and in reintroducing them to that cataclysmic image, the question of bodies, the world, and collectivity is opened again, like a wound.

The orchestration of dread by the Falling Man affirms Asad's remarks on the singular *horror* that accompanies the West's encounter with suicide terrorism. Asad argues that horror, as an affective response, is unlike terror or vengeance in that "horror has no object" (68). Horror evades the logic of plots and recognition and instead destabilizes the very condition for establishing such logics at all. While terror, as a form of fear, may establish an identifiable danger to life, horror obstructs our capacity to identify the danger and so also to demarcate the boundaries of the self or the collective: "Horror explodes the imaginary, the space within which the flexible persona demonstrates to itself its identity" (68-9). Suicide terrorism provokes horror in part because the perpetrator's decision to terminate his own life along with that of his victims goes against our basic assumptions about the corporeal limits of the self: "One is presented here not just with a scene of death and wounding but with a confounding of the body's shapes. It is as though the familiar, reassuring face of a friend had disintegrated before one's eyes" (70). Asad's explanation follows the account of a suicide bombing at a pizza parlor in Jerusalem, with descriptions of charred flesh, alien disembodied limbs, and the bomber's rigid head laying detached on the street. We find an acceleration of this effect in the attacks on 9/11 with the bodies apparently dematerialized, commingled within each other and in the atmosphere. DeLillo presents his own explication of such a confounding of corporeal boundaries in the talk of "organic shrapnel" by one of the EMTs assisting Keith following the collapse of the towers:

"Where there are suicide bombings. Maybe you don't want to hear this."

"I don't know."

“In those places where it happens, the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later, they develop bumps, for lack of a better term, and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber’s body. The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who’s in striking range. Do you believe it? A student is sitting in a café. She survives the attack. Then, months later, they find these little, like, pellets of flesh, human flesh that got driven into the skin. They call this organic shrapnel.” (16)

Such a phenomenon is certainly horrifying as the attacker and the victim lose any physical means of differentiation following the encounter. While the victim may desire to interpret this as a host-and-contagion relationship, the distinction between the flesh of the one and of the other is too difficult to precisely ascertain.

As a consequence of the suicide bombing, the victims and the attackers become a chaotic, disorganized mesh of tissue, which is further emphasized in Lianne’s revelation as she washes Keith upon his return to their home: “There was more blood than she realized at first and then she began to realize something else, that his cuts and abrasions were not severe enough or numerous enough to account for all this blood. Most of it came from somebody else” (88). Keith’s blood is mixed with the blood of the other victims he was in contact with as they were all subjected to a violent contact with the terrorists who had deemed all of their lives as plotted for sacrifice. The terrorism of the autoimmune community, as explained above, involves a particular constitution of life that

necessarily precludes the visibility and preservation of other lives: all lives beyond the community are constituted by the community as death, as the negation of life.

Furthermore, a crucial aspect of the manner in which political identities are confounded in the self-sacrifice of the suicide bombers as well as their identification of the victims as sacrificial subjects correlates with a Judeo-Christian religious discourse of the sacrifice that relies on a coincidence of life and blood. The Law of Moses, inscribed in the Torah, administers a prohibition against ingesting blood while allowing for the shedding of blood in sacrifice.⁴ As the traditional Jewish laws were adapted and transformed in meaning through the institutionalization of Christianity following the death of Christ, this prohibition on ingesting blood still remained, as evidenced by the decision at the Council at Jerusalem.⁵ In Christian theology, as well as in Jewish theology, the locus of life, or the vital principle, is in the blood of an organism. It is forbidden to eat blood, to take from a living body into another living body in order to obtain life (a practice that carries resonances from pagan animisms), and yet the spilled blood may be used symbolically to *cover* a body in propitiation for sins he has committed.

While explicating a rationality behind the moral and juridical commandments of these religious traditions may be considered to be futile or even sacrilegious, perhaps we

⁴ If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off. (Lev. 17:10-11, 14)

⁵ The Apostle Peter declares, “Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:19-20).

can say that, in this framework, a life identical to one organism may not be ingested to serve the life of another organism as the commingling of lives creates a conflict of identity, particularly given a sacred ontology that establishes the identity of the human as fundamentally distinct from other organisms. This common identity coalesces around a specifically *substitutionary* model of the sacrifice to atone for an individual's breaking of the law. In Christian theological iteration, the cost of breaking the law of the community is death, but the gift that God has given through the substitution of Christ as atonement for the breaking of that law is a life that exceeds mortal life.⁶ While the law-breaker becomes identified with the sacrificial organism in some way, paradoxically, the sacrificial organism is taken to be, in some sense, the immortal sovereign himself who is understood as the original legislating authority behind the law. The one enacting the death is the one receiving it as well, which is the same logic at play in the immunization of a community but transmitted onto the singular figure of the God-man. Esposito writes, "The identification of the victim with his own persecutor marks the height of a sacrificial mechanism set in motion originally by mimetic desire and subsequently institutionalized in the political exchange between protection and obedience" (*Communitas* 33). As a mechanism of preserving itself, the community constructs prohibitions on praxis that define the limits of its identity, which then allows the community to institutionalize this definition in violent forms of security. This means that, fundamental to the Western Christian theology of community, those who belong to the people of God – and not to its outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth – give their lives over, first, to a

⁶ "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

law with which they cannot live in accordance but that binds the community and, subsequently, to a total identification with the figure of the transcendent sovereign who is taken to legislate the moral teleology of the sect, as well as the eschatology of the world. “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. [...]” (Gal. 19-20). The individual is absorbed into the community through the community’s total identification with the sacrificed sovereign.

The point this excursus on a theology of the sacrifice drives at is that fundamental to the Western framework for thinking identity, blood, and life is a two-fold idea. On the one hand, the life and identity of an organism is located in the blood of that organism; on the other hand, the life of the community may preserve itself through an act of common identification through the medium of sacrificial blood. This transferal of identity through an exchangeability of blood lies within the logic of the West’s conditions of identity-formation, particularly as this formation occurs as a process of the self-constitution and immunization of the political community. Asad draws out the paradoxical implications of the role of the sacrifice in Western Judeo-Christian political theologies of the sacrifice in ways that link up with the complication of identity that occurs in terrorism and, more specifically, in suicide terrorism. At the heart of Western civilization, he argues, hovers the arguably most famous suicide in history: the willing submission of Christ to his crucifixion by the Roman governing authorities. Through the blood logic of substitutionary atonement, Christ’s death represented the deaths of those who had broken the law. Therefore, in identifying with Christ through his choice to die, all who belong to the community have their blood-debt paid in full, and they take on a new identity – a new

life – within the suicide that founds the community. As Asad puts it, “In short, in Christian civilization, the gift of life for humanity is possible only through a suicidal death; redemption is dependent on cruelty or at least on the sin of disregarding life” (86). I would develop Asad’s point that Christ was the original suicide bomber of the West, then, to say that Christ pursued the most drastic means necessary in order to achieve a life upon which the coming community could be founded: a life achieved through death.

The substitutionary model of sacrifice translates into a form of terror within liberal democracies insofar as liberal democracy predicates its own political identity upon the exchangeability of blood. Death is in the service of life: the community makes it possible ideologically to preserve itself through the death of its own members because their blood can be exchanged for the maintenance of the group. So long as the bloodshed fortifies the continuity of group identity, the bloodshed is not marked as a loss but as a gain. Esposito writes, “Sacrificing life to its preservation is the only way of containing the threat that menaces life. Yet this is the equivalent of preserving and perpetuating as well life’s capacity to be sacrificed; to ‘normalize’ the possibility if not the reality, of its sacrifice” (*Communitas* 33). The life of a community founded on death sets up life within the community as precarious. The violence of the state towards its citizens has the capacity, in such communities, to be done in the name of those citizens – such is the cruel irony of contemporary political representation in republican democracies. Here we see clear manifestations of the manner in which immunity doubles back on itself, an imbibing of the virus in an effort to inoculate oneself against the same virus. Alternatively, to slightly mix the metaphor, the blood logic of sacrifice sutures the wound in the openness of identity by establishing a political citizenship that, while blocking the wound against

infection, nevertheless paradoxically allows for the draining of that body's blood in service of other bodies identifiable under the same terms of citizenship. The same logic drives the discourse of "just war" in America, as discussed above, and the nobility applied to citizens who choose to enlist in the military, placing themselves in a precarious openness to being sacrificed for the preservation of the community. We see this also in the legal protection of police officers, as agents of the state, to kill civilians, even in many cases in which this killing was not in response to a direct threat. Moreover, we see this in other forms of political violence, such as functions in the mass criminalization and incarceration (predominantly of African-Americans) in recent decades, whereby multitudes of citizens have the privileges of citizenship revoked— such as voting for government officials who will represent them in public decisions – and are transferred into facilities that are, for all intents and purposes, removed from the public life of the political community. These citizens are virtually dead to the community. They are placed in locations that, while geographically internal to the community, are yet treated as outside of that community's common public.

The violence of the political manifests itself in the community's legislative act of legitimizing the violence it does against itself in the constitution and maintenance of itself. We have already seen the terror that this amounts to when the community is put into conflict with another differently constituted community. Here we see the way suicide might be deemed redemptive (regardless of whether or not the bodily victim of the suicide chose the death or not, it is suicide because it is a citizen's death in service to the nation). The exchangeability of blood may become, then, not only a logic of identification but also an imperative of life in the community. DeLillo gives voice to this

idea through the Islamist cell in *Falling Man*: “Become each other’s running blood” (83).⁷ Terrorism, in the militarized establishment of an inside- and an outside-to-the community, is an act that founds the political community. And yet, in the Arendtian form of totalitarian terror that we have seen in Hammad’s cadre, in the Christian imperative to become “living sacrifices” to Christ,⁸ and in Western liberalism’s sanctioning of the sacrifice of its members to the preservation of the community against threats both foreign and domestic, “terror” names the subsuming of self-sovereignty or autonomy under the rule of a totalizing identity. Suicide terror, then, is the giving over of one’s life to the community one aims to found – hence another iteration of the immunitary paradox: the death of identity occurs precisely when identity is being most quintessentially established.

When David Janiak performs his provocative repetition of the encounter with suicide terrorism, he assumes the identity of a recognizable and yet unknown victim of the attacks. He takes on the pose of a man in flight toward his inevitable death and yet suspends it in a spectacle of permanent flight, of a falling that never consummates in death. The spectacle is a complicated one, as onlookers are outraged at the cruelty of his

⁷ It may be that DeLillo is here imputing a specifically Western principle of the exchangeability of blood to the worldview of the Islamist terrorists, particularly since the substitutionary model of atonement, in its Christian iteration, seems to rely on a Western discourse of legality, of guilt and innocence as ascribed to a legal subject whose identity is located in the blood. If such a Western ascription does not fit the cultures from which Hammad and Amir derive their political theologies, then the ascription here reinforces the point that the political community fails to imagine those who exist beyond it except insofar as they are plotted through a sanctioned figuration derived from the logic of the community’s immunized logic.

⁸ “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

thrusting back upon them their initial horror. And yet, Janiak presents to them the figure they had learned to identify themselves with: the victim, the America that had been violated, the one for whom they would allow themselves to grieve because he belonged among them. The United States remembered images such as this one – but most predominantly *this* image – in an effort to preserve themselves after 9/11 as the victims of an illegitimate violence. In this way, the nation produced a preservation of life – by means of legitimizing military violence against those identified with the terroristic threat to life, as observed in the United States Congress’s nearly immediate authorization of the use of force in retaliation for the attacks – through an idolization of the image of the Falling Man, their totem of the America that will never forget. And yet, Janiak’s performance piece is received as an act of terror, with horror and with outrage.

The figure with whom the spectators had once identified, as victims of terror, is now identified with the perpetrators of terror, a substitution that is underscored through Lianne’s descriptions of the man the second time she encounters him, this time near the maintenance platform of an elevated railway track. Every description draws a symmetry to tropes we associate with terrorists, and yet there is a touch of defamiliarization as well: “Falling Man was known to appear among crowds or at sites where crowds might quickly form. Here was an old derelict rolling a wheel down the street. Here was a woman in a window, having to ask who he was” (164). The scene is treated as an entirely local phenomenon, something new and unpredictable and yet for which there are ill-fitting generic categories that might be applied. By constructing a performance that evokes tropes of terror while also revealing those tropes to be too reductive, DeLillo directly complicates our habitual mechanisms of recognition:

There was one thing for them to say, essentially. Someone falling. Falling man. She wondered if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes.

Or she was dreaming his intentions. She was making it up, stretched so tight across the moment that she could not think her own thoughts. (165)

In blocking Lianne's struggle to set the event before her eyes into a narrative defined by intentionality, her facility to establish terms of recognition fall away into the singularity of a situation that belongs to no known properties. The failure of recognition here rebuts Graley Herren's treatment of the image of the Falling Man as an empty receptacle allowing Lianne to mediate a process of understanding however particularly suited to her needs. Against Herren's claim that images, as observed in the novel, "contain the power to anticipate or even dictate our sense of identity, how we locate ourselves in the world" – in addition to our own capacity "to appropriate images to serve our needs" (165) – this scene shows us the fundamentally deconstructive and non-instrumentalizable function the image of the suicide terrorist performs for spectators. The recursion of identity taking place in the Falling Man's performance confounds all capacity to make sense of the event, and this, we might say, is the case with all immediate moments of suicide terrorism. The only consistent sense we can make of such events is the resolution that there can be no sense made, no resolution arrived at. In this sense, I agree with Duvall that "witnessing Falling Man's full performance is not a representation of the horror of 9/11, it is the horror of 9/11 itself" ("Fiction and 9/11" 186). And yet, I would clarify that

this is not the horror *of 9/11*, despite its intertextual connection, but rather that this interpellation of a well-known image from the original fall of the World Trade Center towers into a new setting, experienced in its immediacy, makes the event its own terrorist attack. Despite the natural tendencies of our recognitive reflexes, this is something singularly new, experienced as its own specific terroristic violence.

Lianne remarks on this process of confrontation as it takes place in the reaction of another bystander: “His face showed an intense narrowing of thought and possibility. He was seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours. He had to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit” (168). This response arises from the imprint of the inherent terror of the political that, in constructing a sense of unified identity of life for the community, orients around a particular construction of the world that runs according to its own logic. There will be no crack in the world into which an encounter such as this fits, in its immediacy, because the very activity of the encounter *produces* cracks in the world and, in doing so, brings the construction of the world out of the obscured background back into view. The world is unmade, laid bare and raw, for a moment, until the immunitary reflexes provoke us to suture the opened wound. Lianne herself recognizes her inability to recognize, despite her desire to do so:

She wished she could believe this was some kind of antic street theater, an absurdist drama that provokes onlookers to share a comic understanding of what is irrational in the great schemes of being or in the next small footstep.

This was too near and deep, too personal. All she wanted to share was a look, catch someone's eye, see what she herself was feeling. She did not think of walking away. He was right above her but she wasn't watching and wasn't walking away. She looked at the teacher across the street [...] (163)

Her description shows that even an aesthetic genre invented to capture that which disobeys the normative conventions of plot and order – that is, absurdism – fails to capture the sense of the terroristic act, which is by definition senseless at the moment of its eruption. The defamiliarizing effect of the nearness and non-reductive quality of the event recursively deconstructs the conditions for recognition, such that the woman in the window has to ask who this “known” figure was, and Lianne feels as though she could not think thoughts that were identifiably her own. Perhaps in thinking the thought that her thoughts are not her own, she does indeed think an immediate, genuinely personal thought; the encounter provokes her to think her inability to rely on habitual patterns of thought.

However, Lianne's first response is to remain at the ground zero of the encounter and, instead of watching the performance above, to turn her gaze to those bystanders with whom she shares the encounter without a common understanding. The significance of this narrative gesture captures the aesthetic-terroristic function of the novel itself: it is an act that draws the latent background conditions of the social world into visibility through the eruption of an encounter unaccounted for by the logics of that world. More precisely, following Sloterdijk's theory of “atmoterrorism,” the novel's act of terror involves the explication of the latent conditions for life, which I have been taking to be part and parcel

of the activity of political identity-formation. The posed body in free-fall, appearing like a contagion unexpectedly throughout the city, disrupts the processes of collective identification underway throughout the city and the nation in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, while drawing into an “awful openness” the mechanisms of visual recognition and the symbolisms of blood by which citizens identify one another. Symmetrically, DeLillo’s novel more broadly draws into an “awful openness” a variety of elements at work in the ecology of political community-formation that have always functioned in the background, though perhaps previously ignored. We have seen some of these elements at play in the formation of Amir’s sect: the sharing of a close space, the identification through mythic narratives, and the practicing of ritualistic communal norms. DeLillo sifts these elements out of the general imbroglio of social forces for distinct explication, as a meteorologist might separate wind speed from barometric pressure and from moisture content in the atmosphere. Our habitual modes of thinking about the social world, or the interplay of politics, religion, and community, may tend to flatten distinctions between each of these mechanisms of force – just as our habitual modes of thinking about the weather often favors a general impression of current conditions over a scientific explication of the different elements that must function together to produce the particular atmosphere that we walk through. The elements at play in community-formation, in their unexplicated flattening, are taken to be cultural givens. However, Sloterdijk argues that in the modern era unfolding from that initial moment of atmospheric terrorism at Ypres Salient, these givens have “moved over to the side of the represented, the objective, the elaborated, and the producible” (107). Terrorism, as a form of power, “explicates the environment from the aspect of its vulnerability” (107). Therefore, DeLillo’s novel, as an

act of aesthetic terrorism, not only thematizes the instantiation of terror that precipitates out of the violence of the political but also examines the elements in the social-political environment that make the environment vulnerable to precipitations of terrorism. The vulnerability is suggested through the symmetry between these elements, when occurring in situations not typically associated with terrorism, and their appearance among Amir and Hammad's cadre.

The element of sharing a close space appears as one force at work in constellating individuals into closed communities in response to fears of alterity outside the space. This shows up, first, in the fact that Keith, following the apocalyptic moment of the attacks, attempts to exit the ruptured space he had been occupying – which was “not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (3) – by retreating to the last space of intimacy he had known: his home with Lianne. After the two have spent some time together again, Lianne remarks on Keith's motives for remaining there (with some doubt as to the truth of her understanding), “This is where he wanted to be, outside the tide of voices and faces, God and country, sitting alone in still rooms, with those nearby who mattered” (20). Lianne's explanation suggests that the return to the intimate community of a close, shared space is pursued as an attempted retreat or exodus from the broader collective responses to the catastrophe circulating through the political atmosphere. It is the retreat to something known and valued, something constitutive of shared memory, away from the larger processes of constructing shared knowledge and value in response to the apocalyptic event. Alternatively, Keith also becomes connected with Florence Givens, another survivor of the tower's collapse. The two share several intimate conversations in Florence's apartment across the park, to the point where Keith

feels with her as “double in himself, coming and going, the walks across the park and back, the deep shared self” (157). He ends his visits to Florence in order to return “to safety and family, to the implications of one’s conduct” (157). Here Keith develops Lianne’s explanation: he chooses the familiarity of his old life with Lianne and their son Justin as a sense of safety in response to safety’s rupture. But it may also be added that this retreat involves a safeguard on dividing himself, or sharing himself, too plurally. It is the retreat to *a* community, the consolidation of a self he once had known in a space that was familiar.

Two other spaces that become crucial loci for the explication of other elements at play in community-formation are, for Lianne, the weekly storyline sessions she leads in East Harlem as a therapy group for people in the early stages of Alzheimer’s and, for Keith, the space of the poker table. The power of these spaces unfolds distinctly for Keith and Lianne, respectively, because following the attacks, the regular poker games ended, partly due to the deaths of some the players, “but the sessions took on a measure of intensity” (29). The storyline sessions are devoted to the practice of writing memory into narrative, as the participants reach into themselves to capture narrative truths about their lives. This space, while not obviously religious in its essential definition, functions much like a religious space of self-constitution. The practice of writing memory into narrative as an exertion of authority over one’s life works as a sort of individualized myth-making: “They signed their pages with first name and first letter of last name. This was Lianne’s idea, maybe a little affected, she thought, as if they were characters in European novels. They were characters and authors both, able to tell what they wished, cradle the rest in silence” (30). The storyline sessions offer an explicit case of the conscious construction

of narrative meaning as an act of control, to shape a life into an order, to make sense of it as a defense against the disorder of the world and the deterioration of individual memory. This practice is similar to religious references to authority in an effort to establish narrative truth, as in the veneration of sacred texts or mythologies: “This was their prayer room, said Omar H. They summoned the force of final authority. No one knew what they knew, here in the last clear minute before it all closed down” (30). These lines figure the therapeutic practices of geriatric patients in a way that sounds much like the eschatological assurance of the suicide terrorists: the possession of unique knowledge, hidden from others, backed by a final authority. It is the rigorous establishment of a plotted identity as a preparation for the dissolution of identity, achieved differently in either case, but nonetheless clarifying the narrative practices and assumptions involved in the constitution of identity.

The practices surrounding Keith’s poker table, even in retrospect, also run symmetrical to ways we might understand religious community-formation. However, if the storyline sessions parallel the interior means by which individuals grapple with identity-into-death, the poker games parallel the formal aspects of religious practice that structure groups liturgically. The description of the games’ changes over time reads as a satire of religious reform, how play and experimentation solidifies into enforced praxis: “The banning of certain games started as a joke in the name of tradition and self-discipline but became effective over time, with arguments made against the shabbier aberrations” (96). Over time the players prohibit various versions of the game, “and with the shrinking of choice came the raising of stakes” (97). They also prohibit food at the games, as well as all any liquors that are not dark in color. The practices evince the

gradual development of a self-imposed ascetic discipline that reinforces the sense of grave ceremony surrounding the games, despite the practices' origins in playfulness. The community that forms around the poker table is characterized as resulting from "the transcendent effects of unremarkable habit" (99). The outlier among the group is Terry Cheng – an outlier not because he questions the play of disciplines but because the players are not disciplined enough in their approach to the game: "They enjoyed doing this, most of them. They liked creating a structure out of willful trivia. But not Terry Cheng, who played the sweetest game of poker, who played online at times for twenty hours straight. Terry Cheng said they were shallow people leading giddy lives" (98). Amid this satirical portrait of poker as religious ritual, Terry Cheng appears as a zealot, one who commits wholly to the game and evaluates others based on their commitment to the game. In this way, DeLillo constructs a symmetry between Terry Chang's statement to the group and Amir's statements to Hammad – both figures remark on the need for the others to become more serious in their commitment to the practices of the community, to identify more wholly with the practices that define their common identity.

After the attacks, and following some months spent with Lianne, Keith returns to poker, though this time at high-stakes tournaments in various cities. The former games became impossible after the attacks, and with the loss of the ceremony that bound them to each other, the players found they had nothing in common anymore: "There was nothing left, it seemed, to say about the others in the game, lost and injured, and there was no general subject they might comfortably summon. Poker was the one code they shared and that was over now" (129). However, it would seem that Keith's return to the game of poker reveals that the former practices had left a certain imprint on him, that the game's

absence drew out the lack of a property around which he had once constituted himself in common with certain others. The others have gone away, and he feels the loss of the shared game. When he returns to poker, the game takes on a stronger significance: “In about the seventy-seventh game of hold ‘em, he began to sense a life in all this, not for himself but the others, a small dawn of tunneled meaning” (189). He identifies a larger community constructed around this game, the manner in which the practice and community of the game itself constructs a life for these others. Much like the totalitarian terror involved in the above discussion of communities of terror, the poker game becomes a closed and all-consuming space for these others: “This was never over. That was the point. There was nothing outside the game but faded space. She blinked and called, blinked and folded” (189). The game offers a wholly ritualistic space, casting an invisibility on anything beyond it.

Aaron DeRosa argues that the enclosed world of the poker game reveals a recourse to a “homogenous empty time” of undifferentiated experience in response to the apocalyptic cataclysm of 9/11, the privileging of “an eternal presentism that negates the authority of the past and future” (55). He raises an incisive point about the nature of a particularly financial-capitalist narrative taking hold in post-9/11 America – a narrative that is rather a non-narrative, a happening that disavows material consequence, the constant activity of the gambler with disregard for futures or traditions except insofar as they serve the present flow of finance. While DeRosa’s account takes into consideration the (non-)values that govern in the American “counter-narrative” to 9/11, it is yet important to note the mechanism of other sorts of forces at work in the production of such narratives. Keith ultimately absorbs himself into this game and the life it produces,

perhaps as a negation of a broader sense of global time and history, as the evasion of events as such, but the high-stakes games pick up where his former constitutive community dissipated in the wake of the attacks: “He was fitting into something that was made to his shape. He was never more himself than in these rooms [...] These were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine run of cards” (225). In these games, Keith retrieves a formal property around which he had constituted his life; only in this case, he gives himself more wholly over to the totalitarian form. In a certain sense, he enacts a “return to normalcy” in the wake of a nation caught up in global chaos. But this normalcy is a nationalism of form, brought near to the ritual movements of his own body, the limits of his particular life: “[H]e hadn’t known until now, looking at that vast band of trembling desert neon, how strange a life he had been living. But only from here, out away from it. In the thing itself, down close, in the tight eyes around the table, there was nothing that was not normal” (227). Here he slips away from his life with Lianne, which has become strange in the light of a stronger, more rigidly enclosed form of life. The life that emerges from the game for Keith constitutes his self-identity: he becomes utterly definable by the game, negating any aspects of his life that might exceed the limits of the game: “He wanted to rake in chips and stack them. The game mattered, the stacking of chips, the eye count, the play and dance of hand and eye. He was identical with these things” (228). As with the earlier discussion of the identities that emerge from a community’s auto-immunization, Keith gives himself over to a life into which the violence of the game shapes him. The game becomes a world to him, containing its reality comprehensively.

Keith finds in the life of the game an inoculation against the mortal danger of contingency and event, but this comes at the cost of his own vital potential to *become*.

If we accept Sloterdijk's argument that terrorism in the modern era involves the explication of latent environmental conditions from the aspect of their vulnerability, then we can say that the aesthetic function of DeLillo's novel is to perform a terroristic explication of the conditions for community and identity. With the interpellation of the audience by the Falling Man performance artist, we observe a confounding of the spectators' habitual modes of recognition and identification. It becomes unclear where the line between terrorist and victim essentially resides, and such a condition refutes the spectators' ability to justify in the usual ways the immunization of the community against terroristic threats. This runs parallel to the above discussion of the terroristic violence inherent to the constitution of political communities – the necessary antagonism at play in the establishment of communal values, freedoms, and identities. The apocalyptic moment of 9/11, while violently rupturing the logics of democratic-liberal politics within American hegemony, brought to the fore, at least for a moment, the constructed quality of the American political community. The nation was forced to decide how they would choose to understand themselves in their response to the attacks, and, for the most part, they chose the path of immunity, underscoring the boundaries of an American identity.

Similarly, the aesthetic terrorism of *Falling Man*, as it confounds identity, also draws to our perceptual spotlight the largely obscured mechanisms by which we construct and understand ourselves, *who we are*. These mechanisms – which include the sharing of close space, the writing of narratives, and the emergence of formal rituals and prohibitions – are centered around the production of community, as well as the manner in

which we ourselves are caught up in and transformed by community. By explicating these mechanisms to us, as spectators of the novel, DeLillo puts us in a position where we, too, must decide on our response, knowing that many of the means available to us for constructing common identity run parallel to those that result in terror. These particular elements are explicated here as strategies of power at play in the social ecology within which we interact and present ourselves. Such an explication relies on a theory of power, following Foucault, that does not assume a state sovereignty or a specific institution to administer its force but rather views power as “the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable” (*History of Sexuality* 93). In this view, power is everywhere, as in an atmosphere full of functional elements that dynamically precipitate into contingent forms. Mechanisms like ritual, identity, the sharing of space, and the closure of community constitute strategies of power responsive to already precipitated or precipitating states of power. Terror, though a product of these strategies, also makes these strategies visible.

“Living tissue, who you are”: Terror and Control

The core themes animating this essay emerged through the encounter with a work of art in *Falling Man*. The presentation of the work of art functions as an act of terror. The act of terror functions as an apocalypse in both senses of the word, as world-shattering catastrophe and as revelation or uncovering. The apocalypse confounds our habitual practices of constructing social worlds and communities. Furthermore, the

apocalypse also reveals the contingency of enacting these logics, which so often tend toward the terrorism of autoimmunization and which nevertheless reside all around us in the atmosphere, “already in the air, in the bodies of the young, and what is next to come” (*Falling Man* 70). As the aesthetic terrorism of the novel turns our eyes back to life in its intricate vitality, we face a menacing vision: we are left with the horror of the confusion and loss of identity and the paranoia of the policing of identities. What we have, then, is an apocalyptic aesthetic that ends the world as we know it simply by explicitly articulating to us the mechanisms that make our world. The air becomes dystopian. Nevertheless, there seems to be an urging in the novel toward some way of coping with these dangers, and what we find in the figures of Keith and Lianne are two different gestures toward exodus from the poisonous conditions of the post-9/11 atmosphere. These gestures, as I will argue, necessarily fail because the novel lacks a sufficient acknowledgment of the nature of control in the present era.

Before articulating these two responses, however, we must be clear on the historically emergent patterns of power that also constitute the background to the work, patterns that Gilles Deleuze descriptively captures under the moniker “control society.” While the novel clearly registers the emergence of these patterns through its atmospheric figurations of terror, it fails to adequately acknowledge the dynamic economic substrate involved in contemporary governance of life that channels life into certain formations that cannot be sufficiently captured in an analysis of atomized bodies. Deleuze further develops Foucault’s analysis of the prominent new form of power that emerged in the late eighteenth century and continues to evolve – the shift from a primarily disciplinary power that focused specifically on the particular movements of individual bodies to what

Foucault terms “biopolitics.” This biopolitics, as Foucault remarks in his lecture series titled *Society Must Be Defended*, applies “not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being” (242) and works by “massifying” groups into controllable populations rather than into the sort of embodied individuals that would be susceptible to disciplinary control (243). With this shift, the atmospheric framework for understanding terrorism becomes even more relevant, as biopolitics’ primary modes of analyzing the movements of populations are, we could say, climatological in nature, though seeking to analyze specifically *human* populations in their relationship to the larger milieus in which they reside: “The phenomena addressed by biopolitics are, essentially, aleatory events that occur within a population that exists over a period of time. [...] The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures” (246). From these analytical schemes, biopolitics attempts to control the development of life within certain populations not by focusing on the direct manipulation of individual bodies but by *regularizing* the overall flux.

The goal of this power is to produce social norms that serve the interests of the biopolitical governing entities – interests that, as biopolitics links in with the development of neoliberal privatization and naturalization of market dynamics during the twentieth century, become primarily economic in nature. Foucault notes in his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* that the role of neoliberalism takes on a uniquely radical form in America from the mid-twentieth century onward: “American neo-liberalism still involves, in fact, the generalization of the economic form of the market. It involves generalizing it throughout the social body and including the whole of the social system not usually conducted through or sanctioned by monetary exchanges” (243). This

“absolute generalization” of the form and logics of the market demanded “a sort of economic analysis of the non-economic” (243). Therefore, power grapples with the movements of social populations in economic terms and seeks to enforce a regularity between those movements and the flow of financial capital, toward the growth and fortification of the market. Deleuze argues that as the proliferation of biopower transforms the larger part of society from disciplinary society to “societies of control,” biopolitics places previously governable “interiors” – which are enclosed institutions such as the family, the school, and the prison – into crisis, favoring rather the more adaptive control afforded through *modulation* (“Postscript” 4). Like Foucault’s *regularization*, *modulation* affects the general movement of mass populations, exerting mechanisms of security and freedom onto the flux in order to enforce a general movement toward market productivity and national interest within the global market.

If power has moved toward modulation of adaptive and unenclosed realms of social experience, then a disproportionate analytical orientation toward singular bodies and enclosed institutions fails to respond to the real power at work in a social milieu. And yet, both Keith and Lianne Neudecker seem to be entrapped in such orientations by the end of *Falling Man*, even as they attempt to free themselves from the negative terroristic conditions stirring in the post-9/11 air. Linda S. Kauffman, in her reading of the novel, argues that the central atomistic theme of the text is that “what unites us is that we are all bodies in rest or motion, in space, on a small planet” (141). While admitting that the novel lacks a moral imperative, Kauffman argues that it nonetheless encourages us to consider empathically the unity of our experiences as bodies in the environment. However, we should consider, with an awareness to the workings of control society’s

massifying tactics, that an empathic attention to bodies as atomized singularities may be missing a crucial point about the workings of power today.

Keith's and Lianne's gestures toward exodus from controlling modulations of life are, in fact, centrally bound up in the individual body, either as its negation or its affirmation. They attempt to enclose themselves in a restricted iteration of life, to immunize themselves against the apparently dangerous processes of living, produced by the atmosphere of terror, that would cut through them. For instance, we have already seen Keith's retreat to the enclosed world of the poker game. Keith's gesture is marked by a disavowal of the body, as he submits the movements of his body to the totalitarian control of the rules of the game and the play of chance. His is a rigid form of life that commands the body comprehensively, through its rituals, and so makes itself appear as a territory securely protected from the control society that monitors and modulates the processes of life as such. Even if this retreat to totalitarian ritual-formalism succeeds in bracketing Keith off from the global community, it presents to us the (dis)embodiment of the terror of immunity, preserving Keith's life by giving it a specific form while simultaneously ending his life by cutting it off from the ontological openness to becoming through relationship with others that allows it to be life in the first place. However, the modulation of life in control society would seem to problematize our lauding of such openness to living, if it is such openness to living that gives entrance to the influence of a biopolitics interested more in the preservation of the market than the flourishing of human beings. We will need to ask ourselves whether the terrorism of immunity is the only way out from control, as well as whether that exit can even be possible, given control society's capacity to instrumentalize communities toward the governance of

populations. Community may also be the entryway for governmentality to identify populations and therefore influence their movement or suppress them when they venture too radically apart from the norm.

If Keith responds to terror and control through a disavowal of the body, we could say alternatively that Lianne responds through an affirmation of the body as a defense against terror, but in such a way that is still too atomized to account for the work of control. In the final scene focused on Lianne, we find her contemplating her body after thinking through her relationship to God and religion, having recently half-returned to the Catholic church as a means of finding some resolution or comfort following the catastrophe:

There were nine people at mass today. She watched them stand, sit and kneel and she did what they did but failed to respond as they did when the priest recited lines from the liturgy.

She thought that the hovering possible presence of God was the thing that created loneliness and doubt in the soul and she also thought that God was the thing, the entity existing outside space and time that resolved this doubt in the tonal power of a word, a voice.

God is the voice that says, "I am not here." (236)

Lianne makes two direct moves against the sort of immunization that we have already identified as functioning in the nature of terrorism. For one, she opts out of the ritual vocalization of the liturgy. While she performs the embodied motions of the ceremony (not, perhaps, unlike Keith at the poker table), she does not participate in those statements that offer the core ideological binding principles of the religious community. Such rituals

serve to close the community against others who would not agree with the propositions included in the liturgy. Second, Lianne thinks of God in terms that explicitly mark the concept of “God” as a property around which an immunized community would coalesce. God as a property of an enclosed community *would*, in fact, create loneliness in the sole for those who fail to wholly belong to the community. The loneliness is a product of the lack of the common property that binds the belonging-togetherness of the community, which in this case has been defined as God. Therefore, to think of God as the voice that says, “I am not here,” is to think of God as the *lack* that cuts across communities, refusing immunization; “God” is the name Lianne applies to the *munus* that, when genuinely shared, upholds the community’s openness against the terrorism of immunization. In this way, Lianne stands in as the “non-devoted intelligentsia” that Sloterdijk argues is necessary within “the twilight of immunity” (110-1). In such a condition, those who understand the play of power and violence in the contemporary world are disillusioned to such a degree that they give up on the claims to a universalist ethics and peaceful coexistence. Yet, they cannot enact their antagonistic immunities innocently.

Lianne still seeks some sense of safe enclosure, but she shows an awareness of the dangers of closing around communal boundaries. Therefore, she pursues a sense of enclosure oriented around her own body, instead:

It was just her, the body through and through. It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn’t even something she smelled so much as knew. It was something she’d always known. The child was in it, the girl who wanted to be other people, and obscure things she could not name. It was a small moment,

already passing, the kind of moment that is always only seconds from forgetting.

She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue.

(236)

The way Lianne thinks of this reconciliation with her own body sounds fatalistic, in a way, as though this were the best possible resignation in a world that does not allow for emancipatory sentiments. At first, she thinks of her body as a visceral complex, involving the physical excretions of heat and sweat. But then she turns to viewing the body as a container for memory and identity, the sorts of things that are already bound up in community and, in their own contingency and constructedness, allow for the community to exert influence over the person's form of life. She imagines the potentialities that have been eliminated in her own contingency, the "other people" she wanted to be and might have been but is not. In this sense, she perceives her body as a container of being, trapped in its own facticity, and this is for the fact of its being enclosed, solid, identifiable *as* her. Again, she treats the body here as an atomic entity, separable from the rest of the world and from others. While she avoids the terrorism inherent to community-formation, her recourse to the enclosure of the body does not avoid the danger of immunization but just, at best, minimizes its effects on those around her. "She wanted to be safe in the world" (216), to preserve herself in some available fashion. Perhaps the problem comes down to her viewing *herself* as comprehensively contained in her singular, atomic body, that her embodied nature might offer a safety against the terrorism that would take her up, too, in its activity.

It is worth noting here that, while revealing the other terroristic elements at work atmospherically, the terrorism in the novel is still represented as singularly embodied. Take the Falling Man as a precise case-in-point. The Falling Man mimics the bodily form of a specific victim of the bombing of the World Trade Center towers. In his act, a single body is held in suspense before the spectator's eyes, frozen in free-fall but never allowed to drop all the way, as happened for the original victim on the day of the attacks. Janiak's repetition of the event of terror takes the form of a suspension of bodies, as though the fear we would associate with the performance (apart from the horror of a confounded identity) is the loss of the body – the body's death. If the performance were to go all the way to impact – (forgive the grotesque suggestion) – perhaps it would capture a more visceral horror associated with the terrorism of 9/11. Martin Amis refers to a particularly upsetting detail that returns to his imagination as he remembers that day, that of “the ‘pink mist’ in the air, caused by the explosion of the falling bodies” (“The Voice of the Lonely Crowd”). This phenomenon was discussed in the news reports of the weeks following the events: “[S]ome of those nearest the flames chose to jump rather than suffocate or burn to death. They landed with such force, according to an eyewitness who was watching along with New York's mayor, Rudy Giuliani, that a pink mist of gore rose from the sidewalk as they hit” (Adler). This is, of course, an element of suicide terrorism that cannot be performed by a street artist – a fact that likely contributes to the singularly abject horror it provokes – but it also emphatically underscores the atmospheric nature of terror in control society, which involves not merely the sovereign administration of death but also the proliferation of death and disembodiment through the atmosphere.

It is perhaps best to say that *Falling Man* simply does not provide answers to the contemporary situation of atmospheric terrorism and control that provokes our fears and paranoia, but rather that the novel more clearly outlines the sorts of questions regarding power that we ought to be asking today. If many of the political options available to us tend so susceptible toward the violence that is functionally inherent to terrorism, how do we keep our hands clean and allow for life, rather than death, to proliferate across the globe? While the novel does not provide a direct answer to this question, I would like to conclude by suggesting that we might get a glimpse of a solution through a particular interpretation of Lianne's experience viewing the still life paintings by Morandi: "The objects in the painting faded into the figures behind them, the woman smoking in the chair, the standing man. [...] She was passing beyond pleasure into some kind of assimilation. She was trying to absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it. There was so much to see. Turn it into living tissue, who you are" (210). In this scene, for a moment, despite what other gestures toward enclosure Lianne might be making elsewhere, we observe her attempting to absorb the multiplicity of that which is around her. This act is an act of appropriation, where that which fluctuates in the atmosphere, that which exists as other to her and outside herself, she attempts to bring within, to turn "into living tissue," who she is. The move Lianne considers in this scene, in viewing a depiction of a still life that refers her apocalyptically back to the life that conditions everything around her, works against immunity in all senses. Here Lianne enacts something that Esposito, developing an idea present in Deleuze, calls "'a norm of life' that doesn't subject life to the transcendence of a norm, but makes the norm the immanent impulse of life. [...] [It is] giving to the norm the potentiality of life's

becoming” (*Bíos* 194). This association with the life that circulates all around us is not animated by the impulse of preservation but that of assimilation: opening oneself to alterity and the othering of oneself. The danger in this technique is that it provides no safety, no protection from the world – it is absolute vulnerability. Particularly in control society, there is no promise that openness and the allowing of life itself to constitute our norms – thinking the norm in the unity of life – will save us from the machinations of neoliberal profiteering and the insidious seductions of consumer-capitalism. However, the problem regarding the terrorism *inherent* to the political – and not as *exceptional* to it – that *Falling Man* reveals through its own act of terror upon spectators can contribute virtuously to our approach to the world. When we consider the historical costs of pursuing counter-terroristic violence as a response to the spectacular violence that emerged into visibility during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, we might at this juncture do well to consider the warning that U.S. Representative for California Barbara Lee voiced on September 14th, 2001, as she cast the lone vote against the authorization of retaliatory war: “As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore.”

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